PRESS RELEASE

Africa’s first community-owned Forest Stewardship Council™-certified sawmill for hardwoods from natural community forests

Some of the world’s poorest people have opened up a new and lucrative source of revenue through Tanzania’s first Forest Stewardship Council™ (FSC™)-certified community-owned sawmill. This is set to triple the incomes that rural villages are able to generate from responsibly managing their natural forests. It will contribute towards local economic empowerment and create incentives for forest conservation; this will help to meet global climate, biodiversity and sustainable development goals.

"Instead of [being limited to] selling logs, now villages will sell sawn timber to increase their incomes... Money is the driving force behind development... This sawmill is for the benefit of all of us."
Hon. Christopher E. Ngubiagai, Kilwa District Commissioner

In 2009, two villages in south-east Tanzania (Kilwa District) were the first rural communities in Africa to be accredited by FSC for employing the highest international standards to manage their natural forests. Since then, Mpingo Conservation & Development Initiative and its partners have supported 12 more villages to reach this status; more than 185,000 hectares of natural forests have been FSC-certified in total.

This represents a massive achievement for community-based forest management in Africa. However, until recently, the ability of these villages to generate sufficient income to manage their forests has been hampered due to insufficient start-up capital finance, equipment, skills and market access. These barriers have prevented communities from adding value to their local hardwoods through further processing.

"There are very few buyers for logs, but huge demand for sawn timber. This is where the money is."
Makala Jasper, CEO-MCDI

MCDI and partners, including World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-Tanzania), local government authorities and communities, experimented using different methods of small-scale sawn timber production. They trialled pit-sawing, renting sawmills and locally-made processing facilities with circular saw blades before progressing to a portable commercial-scale sawmill by Norwood Sawmills.

"We trialled different methods of producing sawn timber. These increased local incomes by 18%, but the technology was out-dated, not efficient and lacked safety measures. Now confident that sawn timber production was the way to go, we sought funding for a modern sawmill."
Makala Jasper, CEO-MCDI

The sawmill, funded by the Addax and Oryx Foundation through MCDI, is entirely owned by communities and will be transported between villages to meet local demand. It is able to process five to six cubic metres of timber daily with exceptionally high recovery of 55.5%, compared to just 30% recovery of log volume with other machines.

"We aim to use everything harvested, including branches and off-cuts, so recovery could get as high as 70%." Makala Jasper, CEO-MCDI

The official handing over and launch took place on Friday 13th in Ngea, one of the first villages set to benefit from the mill. Hon. Ngubiagai, Kilwa District Commissioner led the first public demonstration. He presented certificates to 19 trainees, including 10 community members from five villages, who qualified as sawmill operators and saw doctors following two weeks of training by Tanzania Forest
Industries Training Institute. This is a game-changing opportunity, which will secure jobs for those involved in sawn timber production; their incomes are set to increase by up to 75%.

"Two people per village will benefit directly by operating the sawmill, and others will benefit from felling trees, arranging logs and other activities." Makala, CEO-MCDI

But the benefits do not stop with the jobs created. Communities will now be able to sell their hardwood timber directly into national and international markets, where there is potential to secure a higher prices and some buyers are willing to pay a premium for FSC-certified timber. Each village is projected to generate more than TZS 150 Million (USD $68,000) from FSC-certified timber sales in year one alone, and they will use the profits to fund local development projects that improve access to basic services such as clean water, education and healthcare. “This will improve the wellbeing of Tanzanian people.” Makala, CEO-MCDI

Responsible community forestry represents a key agricultural sub-sector that will set Tanzania on course to achieve economic empowerment. This sawmill signifies a modest yet meaningful step towards achieving the Government of Tanzania’s goal to transition to a more industrial economy that better serves those living below the poverty line.

"I congratulate MCDI’s CEO for explaining the benefits of forests for increasing the economic status of the people - of individuals, the economy of districts, and of the nation."

"Money is the driving force behind development... District Council incomes will increase because villages contribute 5% of their revenues from forest resources... Government taxes will also increase... villages will be engaged in business and therefore paying taxes to Tanzania Revenue Authority."
Hon. Ngubiagai, Kilwa District Commissioner

Ultimately, in addition to improving the economic prospects of Tanzanians, this sawmill will serve to protect forests and wildlife in the country.

"Income motivates local people to see that the forests have value and the sawmill will encourage them to put more effort into protecting natural forests... Harvesting is done sustainably according to Forest Management Plans and Five-year Harvesting Plans in each community."
Makala Jasper, CEO-MCDI

Initiatives such as this have the potential to transform trade in tropical hardwoods from one which is associated with corruption and unsustainable practices to a sector which is responsible, accountable and which contributes towards forest conservation and the economic empowerment of the rural poor. Manufacturers and consumers of wood products alike can contribute, by opting to purchase products made from FSC-certified timber sourced from well-managed community forests.

Contact details:
For more information or to purchase sustainable, FSC-certified hardwood timber from southern Tanzanian community forests, contact MCDI

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https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B7ovtCbXi2HiMFd0YzBFUFkxdjg
Kilwa District Commissioner in Tanzania presents certificate to newly trained community sawmill operator.

Kilwa District Commissioner leads first demonstration of the new sawmill.

Crowd gathers for sawmill demonstration in Ngea Village, Kilwa District, Tanzania.

Kilwa District Commissioner officially hands over sawmill to Ngea Village Chairman.